

Bhāviveka on Non-conceptual Cognitions:

A Study of The *Madhyamakahr̥daya* Chapter 3 Verses 7 to 13, and 265

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1. Two Wisdoms

The third chapter of the *Madhyamakahr̥daya* is devoted to the knowledge of reality (tattvajñāna). In this chapter, Bhāviveka attempts to use the theory of two truths to describe the knowledge of reality. Concretely, Bhāviveka starts investigating the knowledge as follows:

That intellect is considered to be twofold according to two truths. Because it helps distinguishing a correct relative [truth] and an actual object. MHK 3.7

Here “the intellect (mati)” is a synonym for knowledge (jñāna) in the term “the knowledge of reality (tattvajñāna).” Bhāviveka also uses the terms “buddhi (verse 3)” and “prajñā (verses 4 and 6)” as synonyms in previous verses of the third chapter. We can see that Bhāviveka makes a contrast between a correct relative truth and an actual object. I would like to argue the latter going against order of verses. A basic non-conceptual cognition appears there.

2. Ultimate Wisdom

There must be ultimate wisdom which negates the entire network of concepts and works without working into the clear sky of reality (tattva), which is peaceful, directly known, non-conceptual, nonverbal, and free from unity and diversity. MHK 3.10–11

Through this double verse, Bhāviveka shows his understanding of ultimate wisdom and its object “reality.” In regard to the object, we might recall “actual object” in verse 7 in the same chapter mentioned above. The actual object (bhūtārtha) could be understood as synonymous with reality (tattva) in Bhāviveka’s writing. Example of that does not appear enough in his texts, but once he said “..., because a knowledge is opened by means of true

understanding an actual object which is not apprehended¹⁾ in the *Tarkajvālā*. This expression shows that my assumption is not wrong.²⁾ In this way, Bhāviveka treats the object of ultimate wisdom as reality or the actual object. In addition, it should be noted that Bhāviveka refers to the *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā* chapter 18 verse 9 when he defines reality (tattva) in the *Prajñāpradīpa* chapter 24.³⁾

Here, Bhāviveka says reality is non-conceptual but does not say that ultimate wisdom is literally a non-conceptual cognition. In the *Prajñāpradīpa*, however, one of secondary ultimate truths is non-conceptual cognition whose object is reality. So, it could be said that whatever grasps reality is non-conceptual cognition in Bhāviveka's writing. He says that ultimate wisdom cognizes reality in the *Madhyamakahrdaya*. Therefore we could think that ultimate wisdom is the non-conceptual cognition whose object is reality.

3. Conventional Wisdom

3.1. Conventional Non-conceptual Cognition

It fulfills the prerequisites of merit and knowledge beginning with generosity; it determines the results of these causes (= prerequisites), the connection [between the causes and results],⁴⁾ and also the characteristics (lakṣaṇa), and so forth; and it sustains and matures sentient beings by the repeated practice of great friendliness and pity. It should be understood that there is the conventional wisdom based on the twelve sense media with regard to [these matters]. MHK 3.8–9

Here a knowledge of relative truths is called conventional wisdom (sāṃketikī prajñā) and is described as having several characteristics. We could understand that Bhāviveka thinks a field of conventional wisdom goes across one's own benefit and others', namely, he shows what we should do in this world. In these verses, its method and practice are described as a correct relative truth.

As the method that Buddhist should understand in this world, Bhāviveka referred to a determination (vinīścaya). And one of the objects of determination is characteristics (lakṣaṇa) which are the subject of this paper. The commentary on this is as follows:

mtshan ñid ces bya ba ni chos nmams kyi mtshan ñid ni rañ dañ* spyi'i bye brag las nram pa gñis te /
de la rañ gi mtshan ñid ni dños po rañ gi ño bo spyod yul dañ ldan pa nram par rtog pa med pa'i śes
pas ñes par gzuñ bar bya'o // spyi'i mtshan ñid ni rjes su dpog pa'i śes pa nram par rtog pa can gyis
rtogs par bya'o** // TJ ad MHK 3.8 and 9, Heitmann [2004, p. 96.1–6].

*Ganden, Narthang, and Peking omit *dañ*. **Cone and Derge read *bya ba'o* instead of *bya'o*.

The “characteristics” [in this verse] are the characteristics of dharmas. These can be divided into two kinds, according to the distinction between particular and general. Of these, a particular characteristic is one that is grasped by a non-conceptual cognition whose object is the intrinsic nature of a thing. The general characteristic is cognized by an inferential, conceptual cognition.

At first, the definition of dharma should be considered. In the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya*, Vasubandhu had defined a dharma as something that possesses its own particular characteristic.⁵⁾ According to Yaśomitra’s commentary on this definition, a dharma has not only a particular characteristic but also a general one.⁶⁾ Here, Bhāvivēka distinguished the former from the latter from an epistemological point of view. The particular characteristic is an object of a non-conceptual cognition, and the general characteristic is an object of a conceptual cognition. It could be said the non-conceptual cognition which grasps a particular characteristic is a direct perception (*pratyakṣa*) in this case because it makes a contrast to “inferential cognition.” Bhāvivēka’s interpretation of the characteristics is thus clearly consistent with the theory of perception founded by Dignāga. It is not unreasonable to understand non-conceptual cognition in the sense of “free from concept (*kalpanāpoḍha*).” And then, it is important that the non-conceptual cognition as direct perception is referred to in the context of argument on the relative truth.

In addition, Bhāvivēka emphasizes the importance of determination of particular and general characteristics in verses 12 and 13 of the same chapter 3.

It is certainly impossible to climb to the top of the palace of reality without the steps of correct relative [truth]. For that reason, he should first become the one who has clear knowledge by relative truth, then he properly discriminates the particular and general characteristics of dharmas. MHK 3.12–13

When he pointed out that it is impossible to attain the reality without the steps of correct relative truth, he referred only the characteristics without mentioning the other matters and functions in verses 8 and 9.⁷⁾ This Bhāvivēka’s approach might have been caused by a development in his theory of perception.

3.2. Development of Epistemology

It is clear Bhāvivēka’s writing was under the influence of Dignāga’s theory of perception. There was non-conceptual perception that cognized a particular characteristic in his argument of conventional wisdom. We shall argue Bhāvivēka’s position more carefully and investigate its background. In Bhāvivēka’s period, the sixth century in the Indian subconti-

ment, nobody overlooks the influence of logic and epistemology founded by Dignāga. Bhāviveka seriously faced and used Dignāga's theory. Though his usage of the logic was undigested and not precise,⁸⁾ he used the technical terms of logic effectively in debate.⁹⁾ He tried to argue with opponents including non-Buddhist and to prove Mādhyamika's philosophy. It could be allowed to say he had opened his mind to debate using universal logic¹⁰⁾ and epistemology as the latest trend. Bhāviveka accepted Dignāga's definition of direct perception as mentioned above. Of course the perception is conventional for Bhāviveka, but it is correct relative truth. I may say Bhāviveka evaluated Dignāga's theory of perception as the highest convention.

However, we saw that the cognition grasping reality is non-conceptual too. It might be asked whether that cognition is direct perception too. But it should not. Bhāviveka would not permit one to say that reality is grasped by direct perception. Reality should be cognized by ultimate wisdom. Direct perception is the realm of convention in Bhāviveka's theory of two truths. Ultimate wisdom grasps reality that is primary ultimate truth, but the conventional wisdom grasps particular characteristics and so on. Reality should not be the equivalent of a particular characteristic. Bhāviveka would not allow to understand that conventional direct perception founded by Dignāga grasps ultimate reality because ultimate truth is beyond ordinary sense. Therefore, Bhāviveka carefully distinguished two kinds of non-conceptual cognition into two truths.

This strategy could be seen not only in Bhāviveka's argument but also Dharmakīrti's. In his *Santānāntarasiddhi*, he said Buddha's wisdom is beyond our knowledge and description. Once Professor Shoryu Katsura¹¹⁾ commented on Dharmakīrti's intention that only Buddha possesses literal non-conceptual cognition, and direct perception is not completely free from concept. Dharmakīrti should distinguish Buddha's world from epistemological argument as common sense,¹²⁾ even he investigated the argument in detail. After Dignāga, scholars like Bhāviveka and Dharmakīrti struggled between the ordinary world and the one that is beyond.

4. Beyond Non-conceptual Cognition

It is noteworthy that Bhāviveka said even non-conceptual cognition is false if the cognition has an object. He shows radical attitude in the same chapter 3:

A non-conceptual cognition whose object is non-conceptual also is false, because it has intrinsic nature of no self and so forth, like a conceptual cognition. MHK 3.265

According to this verse, whatever grasps something is false cognition. In this sense, the ultimate wisdom is not literally a non-conceptual cognition. In this connection, Bhāviveka has used paradoxical expressions when he positively described such higher cognition. In verse 11 mentioned above, such cognition “works without working (apracārapracāra)” in the reality. In his *Prajñāpradīpa*, such cognition grasps reality “by the method of no-object (yul med pa’i tshul gyis).¹³⁾” In both texts, Bhāviveka tried to dispel the misunderstanding ultimate wisdom and reality in subject-object relationship. It could be said non-conceptual cognition which grasps reality is conceptualized non-conceptual cognition. The highest cognition is simply beyond description for Bhāviveka.

Notes

- 1) TJ ad MHK 3.267 (D122a5, P132a3–4): dmigs su med pa yañ dag pa’i don ji lta ba bzin rtogs (P rtog) pas blo rgyas pa’i phyir ro // (Cf. Eckel [1992, p. 159.11–14]).
- 2) Cf. AKBh ad 1.1, p. 1.8: ajñānam hi bütārthadarśanapratibandhād andhakāram /.
- 3) See Akahane et al. [2013 section 2.2.3.1].
- 4) A reading of “tadhetuphalasambandha-” (= MHK 3.8c) is according to the *Tarkajvālā*. See Heitmann [2004, p. 94.17–27].
- 5) AKBh ad 1.2b, p. 2.9: svalakṣaṇadhāraṇād dharmah /.
- 6) *Sphuṭārthā*, p. 9.22–23. Cf. Sakurabe [1982, pp. 44.6 upper portion–45.4 upper portion].
- 7) Cf. Yasuma [2007, p. (102).1–13].
- 8) Cf. Kajiyama [1969, section 1.3.3].
- 9) Cf. Eckel [2008, pp. 9.1–17.29].
- 10) Cf. Katsura [2012, pp. 42.8–44.17].
- 11) Katsura [1983, p. 104.4–10].
- 12) Cf. Lindtner [1984, pp. 156.22–158.6], Inami [1989, pp. 63.4–66.8], and Eltschinger [2014, pp. 313.21–318.2 (= section 4.4.5)].
- 13) Akahane et al. [2013, section 2.2.3.3.1].

Abbreviations

- AKBh *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya* of Vasubandhu. Ed. Pradhan, Prahlad. 1967. *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya of Vasubandhu*. Patna: K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute.
- MHK *Madhyamakahr̥daya-kārikā* of Bhāviveka. Ed. Heitmann, Annette L. 1998. *Textkritischer Beitrag zu Bhavyas Madhyamakahr̥dayakārikā, Kapitel 1-3: Ausgabe des Textes nach indischen und tibetischen Quellen*. Copenhagen: Videnskabsbutikken.
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- Sphuṭārthā *Sphuṭārthā* of Yaśomitra. Ed. Wogihara, Unrai 荻原雲来. ed. 1932–1936. *Sphuṭārthā*:

- TJ *Abhidharmakośavyākhyā*. Tokyo: The publishing association of *Abhidharmakośavyākhyā*.
Tarkajvālā of Bhāvivēka. D3856, P5256. Ed. Heitmann, Annette L. 2004. *Nektar der Erkenntnis, Buddhistische Philosophie des 6. Jh.: Bhavyas Tarkajvālā I-III*. 26. Aachen: Shaker Verlag.

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